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SUBJECT: PEACEFUL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY MARCH IN CAMBODIA

¶1. (U) For the second year in a row, a peaceful, well-attended Human Rights Day march and rally were held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The December 10 march of approximately 1,000 participants began near the city's centrally located Independence Monument, filed along a major Phnom Penh thoroughfare for approximately four blocks, and ended at a gathering in a large park. Approximately 1,000-2,000 participants from labor unions, NGOs, community groups, and donor countries attended the rally. The Ambassador participated along with diplomatic representatives from France, U.K., Germany, and the European Union. A Phnom Penh deputy governor also attended as a representative of the Phnom Penh Municipality.

¶2. (SBU) This year's event was organized by a working group led by the Cambodia Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC), and was finally approved by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) after some initially negative communications with the municipal authorities. In his December 8 note to the Phnom Penh Municipality approving the march and rally, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Sar Kheng wrote that Cambodia is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and that a march and rally were allowed on Human Rights Day last year. As the Embassy noted in a press release issued on December 9, activities such as the march and rally are laudable, important steps towards the freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and signify that the people of Cambodia are increasingly able to enjoy an open and free society.

¶3. (U) We received reports that other Human Rights Day events took place peacefully and without interruption, as well. In Battambang, an NGO-organized community gathering of approximately 200 people also had the participation of a local deputy governor and some local police officials. Similar gatherings of 50 to approximately 1,000 participants took place elsewhere in Phnom Penh, and Mondulhiri, Kratie, Kampong Thom, Takeo, Kampot, Koh Kong, Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, Poipet, and Siem Reap provinces.
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